

## University of Arkansas, Fayetteville ScholarWorks@UARK

---

### Theses and Dissertations

---

5-2015

# Animal Poems

Elian Mota

*University of Arkansas, Fayetteville*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarworks.uark.edu/etd>



Part of the [Literature in English, North America Commons](#), [Modern Literature Commons](#), and the [Poetry Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Mota, Elian, "Animal Poems" (2015). *Theses and Dissertations*. 1108.  
<http://scholarworks.uark.edu/etd/1108>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks@UARK. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UARK. For more information, please contact [scholar@uark.edu](mailto:scholar@uark.edu).

## Animal Poems

Animal Poems

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing

by

Elian Mota  
Montclair State University  
Bachelor of Arts in English, 2010

May 2015  
University of Arkansas

This thesis is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council.

---

Dr. Geoffrey Brock  
Thesis Director

---

Professor Davis McCombs  
Committee Member

---

Dr. Geoffrey Davis  
Committee Member

## Abstract

A collection of formal, free-form, and hybrid poems dealing with themes of birth and death, nihilism, romance and sexuality, memory, language, and other aspects of the human animal.

## Acknowledgments

Thank you to the faculty and staff of the University of Arkansas English department and the program in Creative Writing and Translation, particularly Geoff Brock, Davis McCombs, John DuVal, Michael Heffernan, Geoffrey Davis, and Elias Dominguez Barajas. Thanks also to Skip Hayes and Rilla Askew.

Thank you to my fellow writers, poets, and translators. Y'all are money.

Thank you to Sarah for life and for everything else. Thank you to Ariel and Mariel for being the best friends I'll ever have.

Thank you to Callie, for being my everything: my bones, my sinew, my blood and the heart that moves it around my body.

This book of poems is dedicated to my son, Solomon Jack Ariel Frederick Mota. I hope you read this and understand that your old man is an animal, just like you.

## Contents

1. A List; I Am
2. Getting It
4. Variation: Fugitive
5. Landing Strip-Mall, 1992
7. Some'll Call It Love
9. Knuckled Up
10. Parallax
12. More Like Mexican Dying Moth
14. Photo: Calysta in Boulder, 2010
15. Variation: Captive
16. The Fathers
18. Theophany
20. For the Boy at the Diner, 2009
22. Dare
24. Curvature
25. Before Star69
27. Variation: Noble
28. Shame You Got
29. Don't Quote Shit at Me
30. Certainty
31. After Peter Howson's "Sisters of Mercy"
33. Beowulf on the Blue Bus
34. Variation: Vulgar
35. To Mr. Freely, With Apologies
37. Night Construction Off Garland Ave.
39. Hips
41. The Best Time to Make Fun of Somebody Is When You're Both Naked
42. Variation: Gradual
43. You Can't Have Both
45. *Falta*
47. After
48. 30 Ellis Smoke Break
50. Variation: Sudden
51. Telling Calysta Where
52. Variation: Tragicomic
53. Winning A Hand
54. Fear in Valencia, 1989
56. Dogwoods
58. To Get World Peace
60. Here Be *Tígueres*

## A List: I Am

A father's utterance of "more garbage" with each opened Christmas present,  
the night-time ocean hushing a drunk Spring-Breaker to the bottom of itself,  
a bridge built over three collapsed bridges gone invisible under muck,  
sustained eye-contact during finger-fucking gestures and slow-jerk motions,  
pitchfork work that bales nothing of God's golden straw,  
a fly five months dead on the sill still mysteriously moist under crushing thumb,  
a warmth-thief spilling cold about the feet of other bus riders,  
the wiggle of teeth at the sight of bloody steak or newborn sons,  
a jarful of frozen bees set to thaw in the sun but won't ever live again.



## Getting It

Standing behind my father  
in the hardware section of the Jamesway,  
eye level with the discolored  
back pocket bulge of his jeans  
while he scrutinized metal shapes  
jangling on hooks in front of him,  
I fumbled with a gag hand buzzer,  
the kind for sale in the backs of my comics  
(but five dollars plus shipping and handling? *'Ta loco?*).  
It'd shined in the parking lot as we walked in,  
a whisper of silver I caught and kept,  
and no one had called after me.

Careless fingering became purposeful winding;  
spring primed, breath held,  
I pressed it against my palm,  
and as I felt the false shock, the comedy of it,  
the warmth of luck,  
my father, frightened by the sudden buzz  
turned and slapped me hard across the face,  
knocking me on my butt,

putting me in a perfect white field  
where neon orange rings burst to whiteness.  
From the real world, above the clear chime of pain,  
I heard metal tink against the tile floor.  
The white gave way and I expected to see  
a hero before me, frozen bold in the follow-through,  
but saw only his brown face, empty of rage,  
regarding me with strange wet eyes. *Vamono* ', he said.  
I got up, leaving the buzzer where it lay.

Variation: Fugitive

That hideous congress:  
spiked phallus of Virus  
trespassing every cell,  
subtracting what's vital to Dog  
and summing its own  
apotheosis.

The truth of water-fear,  
how water turns thunder  
before dried tongue  
and fear-foam.

The mechanism of trembling,  
symptom of compassion,  
in his master's hand,  
as it rests the .22's  
aloof black eye  
behind and between  
Dog's ears.

Landing Strip-Mall, 1992

They were in the pet store  
down a few stores from the Laundromat  
they went to every other Sunday,  
tapping the glass on all the tanks  
when they saw the open bag of blood-red stones;  
She plucked one up after a look around.

“I’m keeping it.”

He warned she should not;  
they looked like treasure,  
not something for the bottom of a fishbowl  
or something she should get to keep by stealing.  
Her closed-mouth smile thinned her eyes  
as she slipped it in her pocket  
and the blackmail bubbled up in him,  
a foul, sulfurous impulse from deep  
in the fen of his human perverse.

The demand: hand it over  
or mom would know

(bypassing dad, so blind

to her wrongs).

Ice in her eyes, she said no

to caring about his power,

to indulging his envy.

In the car on the way home,

he cried quietly into a hamper

of clothes still warm from the dryers,

weakened by the double loss.

## Some'll Call It Love

His eyes the black hunger  
of a baby bird's open beak,  
he stares at the spot on her neck  
where hair interrupts skin  
in a severe peak pointing to hell  
and asks what she's been up to tonight.  
"Sweet fuck-all,"  
she says, and tightens his bonds.  
Seeing the painless frown, she adds:  
"That's how we say nothing."

"By we," he asks, his limbs growing  
lighter and deadlier at once,  
"do you mean French Canadians  
or succubae?"

Her eyes wax-dull, as full of holy  
potential as unlit mass candles,  
she stares through him while  
laying her laughter before him  
and strikes him hard on naked ribs.

He gasps like she's cold rain,  
plays arid and soaks her up  
as she pours herself out  
like a rage-fat cloud.

## Knuckled Up

Hands that hammered a nose  
to blood and wheeze, that held  
loose joints and played the saint  
setting splints to bones they broke  
themselves, that fed lead rounds  
to tank guns like loaves  
into hell's oven,  
now cradle an infant boy,  
now cup his head like an heirloom glass  
half full of the last wine,  
now tap out round rhythmic prayers  
against his fragile back  
to ward off ghosts of milky gas,  
now tighten to mahogany knots  
at the thought of every old danger  
become new.



## Parallax

Night brushes black thick into the trees  
until just shy of their tops,  
where night proper sighs its own blue:  
star-speckled, milky;  
I'm quietly lost in the difference  
between these evenings,  
then, not knowing why, I intrude  
on the hushed dusk in my mind  
by wondering if my sperm work.

Laughter crackles from the back yard,  
tones rising, warm like elsewhere's sun.  
Two voices talk about new pants;  
one can't find them in her size  
and plays it tragic:  
*like, fuck my life, right?*

My seed!  
You fuck your life for pants  
but I might not live forever!

Still, the mouth of night  
yawns over us both and all  
and swallows.

## More Like Mexican Dying Moth

The jumping bean,  
only known sentient legume,  
took all of 6 to 8 weeks  
to appear in the palm  
of a boy who disbelieves  
but hopes he's wrong,  
inside a little clear-topped coffin,  
Monopoly-house green, austere.

If it works, he thinks, the backs of the comics  
are access to powers arcane:  
the glasses will let him see through blouses  
and expose the bonework of hands and feet,  
the boy will throw his voice across the country,  
shock the palms of fools at home  
as their dollar bills float softly, as if tempted  
by pie-scent, from their pockets to his,  
ciphers will fall nude before his decoder,  
men will tremble before his Atlas lats and abs,  
he'll build a death ray, or hovercraft even, perhaps.

They boy lifts the lid and rolls  
the bean into his warm palm  
and after a long minute,  
it moves, it moves again, it jumps,  
and faster than air moving to where it wasn't  
a silence has his head, not as an absence  
of sound but a deafening thing in itself,  
the sharp hush of time's long arrow loosed,  
and he believes in everything.

A few months later, beside the bean he'll see,  
among crumbs a lighter shade of blood-moon  
than their source, the ugly homunculus  
that chewed his way right to the real.

Photo: Calysta in Boulder, 2010

No talk of golden means  
or reductions to geometry;  
but like a poppy field,  
you take up perfect space.

You stand with your palms  
against the crest of your hips  
as if six months pregnant  
with my growing want,  
and still, now, away,  
against the colored world,  
the earth in me shakes to see it.

One night, I dreamt exactly this  
except there was all your skin  
and sunlight was cream  
accenting that soft rising of your clavicle  
and I touched you then  
instead of stealing your light.

Variation: Captive

Raccoon hugs the thin and limbless pine,  
a mossy tumor blent to every grey  
the hour after sundown leaves the woods.  
A quiet fury ripples up her back.  
She can't remember climbing, why or when,  
then Dog yops sharp, Raccoon unhugs and lands  
on the crackling ground, a cloud of scratching fight.  
His nose already bit, Dog feints and strikes  
and finally makes a present of his teeth,  
a spit-wet necklace for his quarry's neck,  
negates her night by shaking an emphatic  
“no.”

## The Fathers

From death in darkling dreams they come  
and visit us who mourn them;  
but what if they are yet undone?  
What, then, can serve as balm

to soothe that burn we all must feel  
for him whom we call father,  
propped upon his shepherd's staff,  
to point to grass and water,

then praise us when we've had our fill?  
"How well you've cleared the earth,"  
he'd say, and laugh with burning pride  
to stoke our in-most hearth?

Horseshit. Sometimes dads will leave  
without actually dying,  
moving, let's say, to California,  
and never even trying

to phone as if he's blocked by soil

packed hard six feet above,  
as if a heaven or a hell  
keeps him from his child.

Which is worse, that mock-death life,  
or a proper mourning?  
I think I'd rather dream him dead  
than know he lives, ignoring.



## Theophany

All what's left is hunger,  
a jagged, slow-spreading sepia ring,  
a cigar burning paper  
from the middle—  
you sad your way home  
trailing a slime of whine  
and boil some rice,  
drizzle in takeout soy sauce  
from its tooth-torn plastic packet  
and say

*thank you*  
*for what's left,*  
*for hunger,*  
*for what can be sated*

and as you take your first bite  
god appears  
and farts bare-assed  
in your face  
and your bowl of tan maggots

falls to the floor.

For dessert:

three crusty days of pinkeye

and tinnitus till the final quiet.

For the Boy at the Diner, 2009

I'd been hating a toddler  
as I waited for a booth open up,  
hating her for her tearful screams,  
for the man who held her  
as he spoke cupped into his phone  
and avoided her eyes and mine,  
for her place ahead of me in line.  
Through the mudroom door,  
an autumn colored tumble:  
two women, three kids in tow.  
The tallest of the children  
tried and failed to hide  
behind the cloudy thickness of his glasses  
the full-lipped smiles of his eyes,  
warm in the unbaked rosy dough of his face.  
The women stopped to fumble in purses,  
the smaller two scratched  
at the quarter-treasure machines;  
  
the boy turned to the child,  
raised his hand like a student,

his creaseless palm waxy, faintly blue,  
and brought it down over the hair of the noise,  
stroked it once with such a tenderness,  
as effortless as instinct, as falling,  
that, then, she hushed to a coo  
and, now, I wake nights wet  
with my own salt, scared  
that not even a splinter  
of such a thing exists in me.

Dare

See the slats ossified

in wet death:

fingers and teeth,

bridge over bridge,

stygian green,

and pupil-dark,

until mud

until hell.

Undress fast,

as cars scar fog

behind you,

under the seventh

streetlight from home.

Decide on three,

jump on one;

be ankles in

before fear

roots in your lungs.

Swim to the far side,

leave the water

as more than man,

run home

before the cops come.

## Curvature

Your towel almost drops  
and my eyes are moons  
dancing a greedy orbit,  
seeking to pull the water  
from the gestures of your surface.  
It is clear why worlds are round.  
Space must bend unseen behind you:  
I fall or fly, or all else does—  
I sublimate in the heat of entry.

Before Star 69

Dial any random seven,  
sometimes ten to be brave;  
grumble into your man-voice,  
pen in hand to feel official,  
ask for your go-to guy,  
politely: Bill Chisholm—  
say it chizzum, not quite jism,  
rounding it smooth with familiar mouth.

Bill is never fucking there.

“Uh, wrong number,” usually.

Apologize sincerely but to them  
who feel the need or right to know who calls,  
them you take for rides—

“I’m Bill’s doctor, his butt pills are ready.”

“Slim, from Slim’s Skinlick Rentals: his pornos is overdue.”

“This Yuri. Mail-order bride die in transit. No refund on deposit.”

A man says one day

in a TV-southern accent

“Why, Bill’s been dead bout eight years now;



haven't thought about him in a while,"  
and sounds sad about it,  
asks who this is— be quick on your feet:  
"He used to work in my office,  
only guy that could fix the fax machine."

The voice laughs thinly, says  
"Yeah, sumbitch was good with gadgets,"  
and extends condolences to *you*.  
You won't know what to say,  
so let the tinny, crackling silence between you  
extend and become the ghost-voice of Bill,  
who once was there, not never anymore,  
until your weak "I'm sorry, too," and hang it up.

Variation: Noble

In her wide-eyed way, Hen scans the corn-specked plain  
of gritty dust. A shadow darkens her domain.  
She's still, then gravity grows on her alien knees  
and forces her into half a bow. She sees  
the oiled brown bark of Hawk, his business end  
now knifing towards the chick he means to rend,  
golden oblivious daffodil deaf to threat,  
a week in age, too young yet for regret.  
Hen flap-jumps in the way.

A geyser, weak,  
of feathers, white, spits up; her open beak  
bleeds breath beneath Hawk's vice, her bent-tine fork  
foot kicks the day away before the dark  
embalms her every sense. Beneath the coop  
the chick forgets and seeks its hatchling group.

## Shame You Got

Two weeks after bloodwork  
I'm sitting again on the tracing paper  
covering the celery-green metal exam table.  
Dr. Dobb grabs my arm at the elbow,  
looks up and down my forearm.  
“Damn, you got some long arms. Big fists, too.  
Great reach. Coulda been a good boxer—  
shame you got Lyme disease,” he said, and laughed.

Hung on his walls and stacked  
any spot of floor he didn't need to step  
were the most beautiful framed photographs,  
all taken by him. One of an old black lab on a beach  
moved me so strangely, so much,  
I'd always ask him to sell it to me;  
it was his favorite so he wouldn't.  
I wondered then: what disease made him settle for medicine,  
when his obvious strengths were art and comedy?

## Don't Quote Shit At Me

I remember

the grapefruit rind, its peel-back hiss,

how in it I could taste something about the morning,

you snatching from me the knife

I'd used to score the skin—

you'd never taken a thing from me

like that before, as if I held fire

not knowing or feeling it bubble my palms;

I was eleven and terrified of you, of blood:

who would I have cut?—,

how you asked me to speak,

how it took me time

because the smell of the grapefruit

had become my whole face,

my throat the wood of its tree,

how I stood finally and told you

I would be better than you some day

not knowing what I meant.

That's what I remember,

not how you made me feel.

## Certainty

We both know what's outside: the fires, the wolves...

What if she gets my eyes and has to squint—

her eyes two nervous crows perched on the mothermilk-

and-coffee pool of her chimera face—

to tell apart the wood-smoke grey and white

from fur and fang? How will she find our door?

Or hands like mine, their long arthritic moods,

could be his only shabby tools to tie

the myriad knots he'll have to learn when lies

and cruelty start their lifetime of unweaving

the fabric of a man. My leaning towards

the grim might manifest a limp in him...

But, oh, that heart. Remember it, my love?

We saw that blue grey storm within you, vast

and spinning, saw that clover, dark and pulsing,

half your love, half mine,

have your love, have mine,

her heart, his heart.

After Peter Howson's "Sisters of Mercy"

All things lead him—  
as his granite face considers  
what little remains of the day,  
of his spring flesh, of the abstract  
falsehoods the sky sells as clouds  
and what might be lightning  
if it would only say *cotton* or *quartz*  
or any of the hard-soft syllables of thunder—  
to the cliff's edge over the sea.

His many sisters—  
those at his elbows hurry him along,  
those down before him sweep his way of dust,  
the eldest offer their eyes in grief and wail,  
the youngest flash panties  
and hold music in their hands—  
abhor his acceptance of despair  
but show him their mercy.

The book he presses hard

against his empty will dissolve,  
as he will, from blood to blood-red sash,  
against barnacle-sharp rocks  
and blend in waves into the brine.

## Beowulf on the Blue Bus

*What, is he flexing? Fuck, he isn't—*

you marvel at him hulking down

the aisle swinging serious biceps.

He stops a few feet from you and turns;

he'll stand for the ride, rigged up crucifix-like,

each broad hand hanging on to the poles

that run overhead on each side of the bus.

Through his wide tank-top arm-holes

you see his back's lats linking to his arms

and becoming wings, or blue-white belugas

breaking soft the surface of a still vanilla lake.

You feel your hand leaving your lap to caress,

to feel that young, striated strength, to see

if it isn't marble and magic, but you stop,

angry, embarrassed at being swayed by his meat-rhetoric,

thinking *what do you want from me?*

But you lapse lovingly back and answer yourself:

*I want to be the briny Brecca in your ocean,*

*to have you reach again with every reaching thing*

*for beauty in me, for beauty such that we forget decay.*



Variation: Vulgar

What was Armadillo  
is half a mortar-torn head  
still in its helmet,  
stinking on the side of 71,  
nub legs upright with rigor.  
Crow lands a yard away,  
cries crow-joy and hops  
kissing-close to eye the find.

*Tell others* gnaws harder than hunger  
and leaps him into black flight  
turned sudden red by the metal  
of a sedan's fast fender.

To Mr. Freely, With Apologies

Inside a pause after compound sentence exercise 2,

Danny said “You was in Vietnam, right?”

and you stopped

like your midnight foot found the coffee table.

A slow breath:

“Well, yeah. I was. Ok, number 3...”

“D’you kill anyone?”

Your face went red,

seemed wet behind your skin,

your body still, your eyes closed.

Like you were reading from the inside of your eyelids:

“When you fire a machine gun into high grass and trees from where bullets are flying out at you, whether you actually killed anyone or not you have to accept that you did and that you had to and wanted to because you made the choice.”

You turned quick and left the room.

Our ears followed you out

and when we couldn’t hear your steps

someone mock-sobbed

and we laughed, bursting  
with all the hollow lightness  
of never before having to choose to live.

Night Construction Off Garland Ave.

I head outside to yell at the noise:  
a grinding, snow-plows on summer roads,  
but brontosaurus big, going deep  
into the ground, into my primitive,  
the world tree unrooting,  
stopping crowbar-cold  
the story I'm trying to write:  
a man gone mad from a noise in the woods.  
In his mind, everything is the woods;  
unless you're home, under blankets in bed,  
you're in the woods.

I look up and see the Pleiades,  
a lure cast out from Orion's belt,  
a greenish haze against the eggplant night—  
a klaxon's more-noise roars somewhere  
like an iron giant's rusty fart and the once-lovely  
seven sisters become a fart in a dark sauna  
and I break and I scream till I laugh,  
till the stars shake at my laughter-soon-tears,

at my loneliness, at knowing

noise never answers, at not having an ending.

## Hips

1.

A tea-gold glacier melted round;  
The memory of taste fugitive,  
the suspicion of sweetness strong.

2.

The before-work sun  
shedding white  
against your walls  
when I woke  
partly fallen  
between wall and mattress,  
you under all of our blanket  
save a single hip,  
a soft dollop of something whipped.

3.

A dune unmarred  
by the harsh Bedouin sandals  
of toil and thirst.  
Sand won't blind my open eyes,  
sand becomes water in my desert mouth.

4.

The  
slow curves  
of honey  
folding over itself  
as it pours.

5.

Hills of new snow  
my eyes sled down,  
exhilarated  
by the rush of our youth,  
by the promise of slowing down  
out of lust  
and laughing still.

6.

My map;  
I ignore the stars  
for your contours.

## The Best Time To Make Fun Of Somebody Is When You're Both Naked

Through the water-dark pendants of her hair  
I see her eyes forced narrow by sudden knowledge  
and an imp-simper—the kind of smile I remember  
my mom slapping off of my face when she caught me  
peeing in high arcs down the stairs of our old building—  
and she calls me *angel tits*.

I have other tattoos on other body parts;  
lots of combos available: *demon feet*, for one,  
or *tree back*, but no such luck. Today  
love gives a little hop as if to loose  
the laughter that rises like steam around us,  
today love cackles here in the shower, skin to my skin,  
and says it again, louder: *angel tits*.



Variation: Gradual

Cat sits like a pornographer; languid,  
black-socked legs spread before him, cradling  
his white paunch. There is always food around;  
he only meows out something crumbled, frayed—  
empty cicada, burial linen—when Mouse,  
steals away with bits of hard food.

In a month or so,  
a final cuteness:  
furred flab overflows  
the shoebox.

## You Can't Have Both

I find the mouse  
and the grave he'd made  
of an empty moving-box,  
through his song  
of sour-milk and meat,  
his body's final halitosis.  
Seeing his tiny naked hands  
I feel a pang:

*O, Mouse!*

*You fuzzy charcoal sun*

*hanging forever, never ending*

*your brown and windless day,*

*how sad you died alone!*

*O, your tiny hands, so human!*

*Will my hands clutch at nothing too,*

*the day I'm found so dead?*

Then, quietly, I feel like an asshole  
when the memory of three nights back

bubbles up through the muck of my poetics:  
scratching noises at the foot of my bed,  
so I tucked my quilt under my heels  
and said “Fuck that—if he got in,  
then he’ll get out,” and went to sleep.

*Falta*

The plantains caramelize  
against the cast-iron pan,  
lending sweetness  
to the oily air of the eggs  
murmuring next to vinegar onions;  
everything sizzles in a hushed applause  
for the song she sings in Spanish—  
*“De que callada manera”*—  
and how he keeps the rhythm with his feet  
while he sets the table.

They sit down at last  
and he salts his eggs without looking,  
eyeing instead some Sunday  
newspaper travel ad,  
a dot-matrix approximation  
of a stone-calm blue  
Caribbean beach.  
*“Mira ‘sa playa”*  
he says to no one

and covers his face with his hand  
to muffle a sound like tectonic grind  
or old wood giving beneath  
the weight of wet earth.

After

So happy, the world,  
when flesh and time wed,  
that thrown rice wakes,  
dances a slow, curvy samba,  
eats the feast and leaves  
only a gleaming table.

So thrilled, the skin,  
relieved of water's constant pressure,  
that it pulls grins across faces,  
lets teeth drop to adorn necklines,  
like pearls smoothed  
by tongues that once moved.

So lovely, the hues,  
the yellows , greens, purples—  
gold, warmth, bug-glow, leaf,  
inner-thigh bruise, storm-sky—  
that they make so terrible  
the following black.

### 30 Ellis Smoke Break

As if strung to her lungs  
in some Gordian arrangement of nerves,  
the nurse's fingers V'd around her cigarette  
on her inhale and closed again  
with her foggy sigh.

Next to her a serial rapist  
from her unit puffed a bent 100  
wedged between four gold teeth  
that lopsided his grin.

I stood, smoking slow  
to linger in her guava perfume,  
her lip-gloss small talk,  
half hard and helpless,  
obsessed with her hands.

The nurse dropped  
her nearly spent butt  
at her heel but

before she could grind it out  
he plucked it up in a raptor swoop,  
switched it with his  
and dragged deep.  
“Mmm,” he said.  
“It’s like smoking your mouth.”  
She didn’t flinch,  
but I was conscious  
of my trembling  
at the romance of his gesture.



Variation: Sudden

At the bubble-gum tip  
of Chameleon's tongue,  
Mantis wears his head backwards  
like a fortune-teller in hell.  
Chameleon retracts his tendril  
and speaks a memory of Mantis,  
his words wet: thin sticks breaking  
under a slug under a heel.

He lifts his hand and rolls  
his independent eyes,  
leans forward, considers,  
leans back, does this six times,  
his glossed fingernail lips  
unsmiling all the while,  
before deciding he need not move at all.

Telling Calysta Where

*After Vallejo*

There in Topeka.

Tendrils of your front yard willow,  
properly somber, usher me to the place  
where the wind plays andantes,  
like in that poem you read me once.  
Neighbors gather, say nice things,  
the sky glowing rose-ghost and gold  
from sunset behind them,  
the ants in your yard, biggest I've seen,  
make short work of the meat I leave,  
I reach for you and hope to remember  
your voice, the arch of your foot.

Not on a Newark street, as spent mass,  
obstructing, contributing to stink,  
causing the man on his phone  
to step over me and say  
"I'm walkin' here!"

Variation: Tragicomic

Squirrel, arrowhead flat,  
frozen in flight  
to never pierce  
the wet lumpy bull's-eye  
squeezed out by the bike's tire  
and spread red before him,  
just out of reach.

His tail,  
yet alive in some electric way,  
nerve impulses,  
bits of foil in spinning winds,  
conduct the limb  
into half-time semaphore  
directing traffic  
towards the violet-milk evening:  
*nothing to see here.*

## Winning a Hand

It's a wholeness I feel, best I can name it.

I mean, I wait and wait and wait,

bounce chips off the table-top felt,

count time by swigs of gin

and sights of spades and diamonds

until everything is just so

and all gears turn for me alone:

the moon-toothed mouth that spoke

all things into being quiets,

then speaks only my name.

Only ever felt it two other times:

once, a summer day on acid

when I became part of a Bear Pond boulder,

the ground humming as I wept

at the sky's kaleidoscoping clover show,

and again in a Holiday Inn double-queen suite

when I fell asleep with my hand on your breast,

the room loud with our post-love hush,

that wholeness trembling like moth-flight

against the lantern-glass bell of my heart.

Fear in Valencia, 1989

Along those streets of cobblestone,  
he walks inside his panic;  
his mother's whereabouts unknown,  
the night air smoky, tannic.

All around him, monsters burn  
alongside giant humans  
high on poles that dance and turn,  
strange, paper-fleshed cartoons

that burn away to pop and spark  
and breaths of heat and soot  
that further blacken on the dark.  
He hastens his pursuit.

This place once seemed a second home  
because he'd known the tongue,  
but now the Spanish that he hears  
rambles, just sounds wrong.

Is this hell? What was his sin?

Someone grabs his shirt—

he screams and stops remembering,

but leaves that hell unhurt.

One day he'll know just what he saw

that night of fears and fires,

and in his bed in Arkansas

he'll dream about *Las Fallas*.

## Dogwoods

With a green glimpse  
of dew-slick buds you wake

in spring and wake me, too,  
a ring wider. I drink

for days and surrender  
to you in white blooming,

years of slight straining  
now the visible bend

towards your honey-scent  
summer seduction, the fruit

you'd promised tacitly.

Come autumn I'll show you

how to age and wither  
but first we'll burn and show

our blood and sunlight

and learn of grace,

to fall from it, with it.

Winter will reveal our bones

baring us to each other,

blameless, patient as limbs

under snow, quiet as faith,

as the distance between two trees.



## To Get World Peace

It's going to have to be some weird scheme  
of cartoon sorcery or mad science:  
turning every bird gray,  
making the world speak backwards,  
or  
maybe a little more perverse:  
a time travelling, super-powered "benevolence"  
nabs the founders of our religions,  
forces them into booze and pastel leisure suits,  
makes them share a pastel house in Key West  
thumping with *reggaeton* and coke and whores;  
all this live-streamed to every screen  
with no commercial breaks,  
or,  
fuck,  
a species advanced far beyond bullets or morals,  
pestered by our radio noise—  
jagged bilirubin crayon strokes  
harshing the white wall of spacetime—,  
blink into our atmosphere  
and declare their want of quiet and slaves;

the sky writhes with the silent mechatentacles  
that hang from their silver jellyfish afloat in the rusty dusk,  
plucking bodies as dispassionately as grocery shoppers,  
and finally it's us against a them that isn't us.

Here Be *Tígueres*

They wait in their furs  
of midmorning orange  
near the banks of my blood's river.  
Their alternating jut  
of shoulder and opposite hip  
contort my crawl,  
how I stalk the sorrow and sex  
of gut-plucked *bachátas*.  
My missing teeth are theirs,  
my fur-bald scars,  
my low rumbles  
that speak similes  
to lovers waiting prone  
for the living calligraphy  
of a painful pen  
to ghostwrite a son into being.  
Their palmed perpetual blades,  
their forgotten distinctions  
between snarl and simper,  
between panting joy, wordless power,  
blood-wet imposition,

solitude, sleepy eyes,  
rough and vulgar tongues—  
all their stripes—  
sit black beneath my skin.